Improvising with Community: An Evaluation of a Community Vocal Improvisation Program

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OVERVIEW

The purpose of the current evaluation project was to assess the community impact of vocal improvisation programming offered by Improvisation, Community, and Social Practice (ICASP)/The Institute for Critical Studies in Improvisation (IICSI). IICSI partnered with the Institute for Community Engaged Scholarship (ICES) to conceptualize and carry out this evaluation.

COMMUNITY VOCAL IMPROVISATION PROGRAM

The program was led by IICSI postdoctoral fellow Chris Tonelli and consisted of a series of weekly gatherings held at Silence Guelph from March-June 2014. The end of the program was marked by a one day Symposium on Voice, Agency, and Improvisation, which included a public performance by program participants and facilitators. The program aimed to provide a safe, exploratory space for interested community members to learn and practice a variety of unconventional vocal improvisation techniques alongside one another while having the opportunity to learn from several renowned vocal improvisation artists. Discussions of histories of vocal improvisation were also included as an important part of the program.

METHODS

The current evaluation used a mixed methods approach to capture feedback from program participants. A brief online survey comprised of quantitative and qualitative items was created collaboratively between IICSI and ICES was housed on the online platform FluidSurveys. Chris Tonelli emailed participants at the end of the vocal improvisation program, inviting them to complete the survey. Quantitative analyses were completed using report tools in FluidSurveys and staff used general inductive techniques to carry out qualitative analyses (Thomas, 2006).

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Respondents engaged with a number of program sessions. The evidence suggests that participation positively impacted respondents' felt levels of confidence around musical improvisation and interpersonal connections with others. Respondents indicated a strong desire to be involved in future programming and that they would be likely to recommend the program to others. Qualitative themes indicate that participants expanded their own repertoire in vocal improvisation and even applied these techniques outside of the program. Evidence shows that participants held varying motivations and priorities for learning. Respondents also indicated significant feelings of safety and confidence as tied to an open and experimental atmosphere, which allowed them to push their own boundaries. Facilitators were praised for fostering a sense of openness and safety, providing clear but optional instructions, and employing crucial mediation skills when tensions arose. The program appears to have fostered significant interpersonal connections and created a unique creative and performative outlet for community. Participants highlighted accessible and enjoyable features of the program and also outlined important suggestions for future programming.

Knowledge gained from the current evaluation will be used to inform future community programming offered by IICSI as well as future approaches to evaluation within the institute.

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INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings of a program evaluation of vocal improvisation programming offered in Guelph from March to June 2014. The program consisted of a series of vocal improvisation workshops open to any interested participants, a symposium on vocal improvisation that was also open to the public, and a final public performance by workshop members. The program was developed and implemented by Improvisation, Community, and Social Practice (ICASP) postdoctoral fellow Chris Tonelli. The following partners supported the programming through a range of cash and in-kind contributions: ICASP; the newly-formed International Institute for Critical Studies in Improvisation (IICSI); the Institute for Community Engaged Scholarship (ICES); the Guelph Jazz Festival; and CFRU community radio.

OVERVIEW OF PROGRAM

Tonelli's program consisted of a series of weekly free drop-in improvisation workshops (which he called community voice exploration gatherings) facilitated at first by Tonelli and then by a series of other prominent vocal improvisers. On June 26th, Tonelli and his collaborators held a Symposium on Voice, Agency, and Improvisation, and the day ended with a free public performance by "Five of the world's leading vocal improvisers in collaboration with the Guelph Vocal Exploration Choir" (see attached promotional materials; symposium information: http://www.improvcommunity.ca/voice-symposium).

Dr. Chris Tonelli describes the programming as follows:

> The Guelph Vocal Exploration Gatherings was a project that began on March 20, 2014. Weekly meetings were held on Sundays 12-2pm at Silence Guelph for the purpose of creating a space for the exploration of solo and collective vocal improvisation. The program was open to anyone interested in participating and saw roughly 50 individuals take part in some part of the program. These sessions were led by Dr. Chris Tonelli, who led the group through exercises meant to help participants explore their vocal potential, the introduction a variety of extranormal vocal techniques, and discussions of histories of vocal improvisation and experimentation. Six weeks into the program, we began to bring guest instructors in to lead sessions. These instructors were tasked with coming up with one method for structuring a choral improvisation and working with the group on realizing that structure in a concert that was to take place June 26, 2014 at the Guelph Youth Music Centre. The instructors included Christine Duncan, Paul Dutton, W. Mark Sutherland, Phil Minton, and Maggie Nicols. This concert followed a day long Symposium on Voice Agency and Improvisation that took place at the Macdonald Stewart Art Centre in Guelph and included presentations by Minton, Nicols, Dutton, Duncan, and Sutherland as well as by the ethnomusicologists Kati Szego and Kara Ann Attrep, the composer/vocalist Gabriel Dharmoo, and poet Rob Wallace.

CONTEXT OF THE CURRENT EVALUATION

ICES and IICSI have a history of collaboration and mutual support, and ICES is the evaluation partner on IICSI's partnered research initiative. This evaluation builds from a previous evaluation of an event run by IICSI's predecessor, the Improvisation, Community, and Social Practice project (a SSHRC Multi-partner collaborative research institute project that ran from 2007-2014). ICES provided assistance facilitating and reporting upon an evaluation of the Summit on Improvisation, Pedagogy, and Community Impact, held May 23-25, 2013. Further information about the summit can be found at http://www.improvcommunity.ca/colloquia/pedagogy .

For the current evaluation, ICES is working in its capacity as IICSI's evaluation partner, collaborating on a pilot evaluation of a community-based program which will, in turn, inform the development of a broader, full-institute evaluation framework that will use a developmental model to evaluate IICSI's programs, impacts, and research processes and relationships. This evaluation delves further into the experiences of participants in a series of improvisation workshops and a capstone performance, and will inform future programming, publicity, and partnership creation activities.

METHODOLOGY

PROCESS

The current evaluation was conducted collaboratively between ICES staff member Lindsey Thomson, ICES/IICSI staff member Elizabeth Jackson, and IICSI postdoctoral fellow and vocal gatherings organizer/facilitator Christopher Tonelli. The three of us worked together to determine an appropriate overall methodology for this evaluation.

The process began with an initial meeting between ICES and IICSI/ICES staff members to discuss roles, possible scoping for the evaluation and associated activities, previous evaluation collaborations between the two institutes, as well as the larger context of the evaluation within ICES and IICSI. Next, a meeting was held between ICES and ICES/IICSI staff members and the IICSI post doc who organized and was a main facilitator of the community vocal gatherings and associated improvisation programming. Discussions during this meeting focused on summarizing the intended goals of the vocal improvisation programming, possible scoping and appropriate methodology for the evaluation, and goals for the current evaluation including desired knowledge to be gained. Further discussions around methodology following the initial meeting led the evaluators and IICSI's post doc to decide that a mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative) online survey would best suit the purposes of the evaluation, interests of program participants, and goals of the vocal improvisation programming. Staff members drafted the initial version of the survey and critical input from IICSI's post doc was incorporated into subsequent drafts and the final version of the survey.

PROCEDURE AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Staff members input the finalized mixed methods survey into an online platform (FluidSurveys). The vocal improvisation program organizer invited participants to take part in the survey via email.

Participation in the survey was voluntary and informed consent was obtained via the email message (please see Appendix A for text from the email script). Contact information for the ICES evaluator was provided so potential participants could contact the evaluator with questions as needed. Participants were also invited to leave blank any questions they preferred not to answer and were informed that their participation or non-participation in the survey would not in any way affect their current or future involvement in ICASP/IICSI community improvisation programming. Participants also had the option of providing an email address where a summary and copy of the final evaluation report could be sent.

The first email inviting participants to take part in the survey was sent out by Christopher Tonelli immediately following the Symposium on Voice, Agency, and Improvisation on June 26, 2014. Two reminder invitations were sent out in the three weeks following the symposium and data collection was closed on July 14, 2014. Participants submitted a total of 8 surveys by mid-July, meaning that eight out of a total of 30 program participants opted to complete the survey (a response rate of 27%).

Data was stored in the password protected online FluidSurveys platform and on password protected computers and was accessed only by those researchers directly involved in the evaluation.

MEASURE

A mixed methods measure was developed by the evaluators to gather insight into the experiences of vocal improvisation program participants. Fifteen items investigated both the processes and outcomes of programming for participants and were evenly divided between quantitative and qualitative response options. Three mixed response items also provided participants with the option of responding quantitatively and/or qualitatively. It was estimated that it would take participants about 10-15 minutes to complete the survey. Please see Appendix B for a copy of the online survey.

DATA ANALYSES

Quantitative data was analyzed and summarized in graphical form using FluidSurveys' reports/output tool. Qualitative data was analyzed by ICES/IICSI staff members using a general inductive approach (Thomas, 2006) in which qualitative responses were read several times and a coding framework was developed and refined throughout the coding process. Data was coded and recoded as the framework evolved and was ultimately refined into seven overarching themes.

LIMITATIONS

Although the current evaluation did strive to collect rich, meaningful data in the least intrusive way possible, there are some limitations to the current methodology that should be noted.

First, we opted for a one-time collection of data at the end of the vocal improvisation programming. Although we believe we succeeded in collecting data without intruding on general program and artistic processes, it is possible that deeper insight into participants' experiences and any changes that occurred overtime would have been better captured by methodology involving multiple points of data collection. Nevertheless, the use of an online survey may also provide insight as to how

advantageous an evaluation method online surveys may be for this particular program and similar community programming offered at IICSI in the future.

Next, although we collected data using a mixed-methods measure, another limitation of the current evaluation is still that we used only one measure (the online survey) and one data source (program participants). We originally intended to include a qualitative interview with the vocal improvisation program organizer but time and resources for analysis were factors in our decision to limit this evaluation to the participant survey.

Volunteer bias must also be noted as a limitation as we do not have a sense of how the data set may be skewed as the experiences and views of those who opted to participate in the survey may differ significantly from those who opted not to participate. Further, although the responses received provide rich insight, particularly on the qualitative side, the small sample size (8 participants) provides a window into a limited subset of participants' experiences within the program.

FINDINGS

QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

Quantitative items included in the online survey provide an overall picture of how participants came to be involved in the program, their levels of engagement in various activities, and initial higher level insights into their felt levels of confidence and connection to one another, which were to be enriched by accompanying qualitative items (described in the following section of this report).

PARTICIPANT ENGAGEMENT

How did you first learn of the vocal gatherings and/or workshops? (Please check all that apply)

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
A. Through the ICASP/IICSI website		0.0%	0
B. Newspaper		0.0%	0
C. Poster		28.6%	2
D. Mailing list (email)		0.0%	0
E. Word of mouth		28.6%	2
F. Other		57.1%	4
		Total Responses	**7**

The vocal improvisation programming was advertised through a number of means including the ICASP/IICSI website, a local newspaper, a poster that was distributed throughout the university and community, through mailing lists, and also learned of through general word-of-mouth. Findings show that a significant number of participants learned of the programming through word-of-mouth, for example through a friend or program instructors they came into contact with through related programming or other community initiatives. The poster was also an effective means to attract participants to the sessions. Although information regarding the gatherings was posted on the ICASP/IICSI website, no participants named this as a place where they learned of the vocal improvisation programming.

How many vocal gatherings with Christopher Tonelli did you attend, if any?

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
A. 1-2		25.0%	2
B. 3-4		50.0%	4
C. 5-7		12.5%	1
D. 8-10		12.5%	1
E. None		0.0%	0
		Total Responses	**8**

The majority of participants attended at least 3-4 of the 10 vocal gathering sessions with Chris Tonelli, with only 2 people attending only 1-2 sessions. This indicates that the majority of participants returned to participate in additional sessions following their first experience with the vocal improvisation programming.

Which of the following workshops did you attend, if any?

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Sessions with Chris Tonelli (March 30 - May 4)		25.0%	2
Christine Duncan (May 18)		50.0%	4
Susanna Hood & Christopher Tonelli (June 1)		37.5%	3
Paul Dutton (June 15)		12.5%	1
W. Mark Sutherland (June 22)		25.0%	2
Phil Minton & Maggie Nicols (June 24)		62.5%	5

None		0.0%	0
		Total Responses	**8**

Findings indicate that participants took advantage of the variety of workshops offered and likely attended more than one workshop led by different facilitators. Workshops led by two facilitators were particularly popular along with Christine Duncan's workshop. It is also probable that the strong local and international reputations of these facilitators drew in participants. Furthermore, it is possible that the final workshop was perceived as somewhat of a rehearsal before the final performance at the conclusion of the symposium and was well attended as a result.

Which of the following sessions did you attend at the Symposium on Voice, Agency, and Improvisation at the MacDonald Stewart Art Gallery, if any?

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Morning paper panel		28.6%	2
Public interview with Phil Minton and Maggie Nicols		28.6%	2
Afternoon artists' panel		42.9%	3
Open vocal workshop		57.1%	4
None		42.9%	3
		Total Responses	**7**

About half of participants attended sessions at the Symposium on Voice, Agency, and Improvisation. Attendance was fairly evenly spread across symposium sessions, with the afternoon artists' panel and open vocal workshop being slightly more popular.

Did you participate as a performer in the final performance?

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Yes		75.0%	6
No		25.0%	2
		Total Responses	**8**

The majority of participants took part in the final vocal improvisation performance, which comprised the finale of the symposium and a capstone event for this section of ICASP/IICSI's broader community programming. Tonelli plans to run similar programming in 2014/2015 in the

community around Memorial University, Newfoundland. The final performance showcased the vocal improvisation skills and techniques that participants' explored in the gatherings and workshops, and provided an opportunity for members of the public to witness – many for the first time – unconventional vocal musical collaboration.

CONFIDENCE AND CONNECTION

To what extent did your participation in the program positively impact your feelings of confidence around musical improvisation?

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
A. Not at all		0.0%	0
B. A little		12.5%	1
C. Somewhat		0.0%	0
D. A great deal.		87.5%	7
		Total Responses	**8**

Participants indicated that their involvement in programming significantly impacted their felt levels of confidence around musical improvisation, with the vast majority of participants saying the programming positively impacted their confidence 'a great deal'. Only one participant indicated that programming impacted their levels of confidence 'a little'.

To what extent did your participation in the program positively impact your connection/relationship(s) with other program participant(s)?

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
A. Not at all		0.0%	0
B. A little		12.5%	1
C. Somewhat		50.0%	4
D. A great deal		37.5%	3
		Total Responses	**8**

The majority of participants felt that their participation in the program positively impacted their connections/relationships with other participants. Half of participants felt that the program 'somewhat' positively impacted their connections/relationships with others while just above one third felt their connections/relationships were impacted 'a great deal' by their participation. Only

one participant felt that programming positively impacted their connections/relationships with others 'a little'.

FUTURE ENGAGEMENT IN PROGRAMMING

Would you be interested in participating in further improvisation programming connected with ICASP/IICSI in the future?

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
A. Not at all		0.0%	0
B. A little		0.0%	0
C. Somewhat		0.0%	0
D. A great deal		100.0%	8
		Total Responses	**8**

All respondents indicated that they would be interested in participating in future community improvisation programming offered by ICASP/IICSI.

To what extent would you recommend to others that they participate in improvisation programming connected with ICASP/IICSI in the future?

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
A. Not at all		0.0%	0
B. A little		0.0%	0
C. Somewhat		12.5%	1
D. A great deal		87.5%	7
		Total Responses	**8**

The majority of participants reported that the extent to which they would recommend others participate in ICASP/IICSI improvisation programming was 'a great deal', with only one participant saying they would be 'somewhat' likely to recommend to others that they participate.

Quantitative items provide initial insights into participants' engagement in and experiences of the vocal improvisations. Participants' responses to qualitative items provide deeper insight into the significance and impact of this programming.

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

Analysis of respondents' qualitative (ie written, open-form response items) comments led evaluators to identify five main themes in the data. Feedback can be grouped around the themes of: Artistic Development and Learning; Safety and Confidence; Facilitation; Relationships and Community Building; and Program Features. Further, respondents provided suggestions for future programming, which we have included below. The following analysis of findings will develop and illustrate the themes by centering the voices and ideas of participants.

ARTISTIC DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING

Many participants noted that the gatherings/workshops contributed to their development as artists and/or that they had learned from their participation in the vocal programming. Most of this learning was related to musical practices – i.e. approaches to teaching, performance skills– and some went beyond the creative realm, as we will describe further below.

One participant simply commented that they had appreciated "Learning something new." This suggests that there is a value in learning for its own sake, regardless of intent to employ or further develop the material learned. Another was more specific, stating that they had particularly valued learning from one facilitator "some of the hand gestures from the Montreal choir and the sounds they refer to and how they expand the possibilities of performing improvisational vocals."

Others had developed new teaching and performance skills:

> *The experience was very illuminating for me. I feel much more capable in my work as a vocalist and music teacher to access and deploy unconventional sounds as they are needed.*

Another commented that participating "over time helped me integrate the freedom and new (to me) sound-making into my musical practice outside the series."

Others commented on specific skills they learned or honed during the gatherings – one, for example, noted that participation "helped me to listen in ways that I haven't fully accessed before."

Another respondent compared the program to other artistic development experiences, noting that it was "Different, yet similar to theatre improv and vocal theatre training that I have been involved with throughout my life" and indicating that they had "Learned many new approaches." One noted that "it's been a game-changer for me musically."

Application beyond program

As mentioned above, participants described a range of impacts from the program that went beyond the artistic/musical ones discussed above. For example, many articulated changes in how they related to others both in and beyond the workshop group, saying that their experiences had created shifts in their ways of listening and thinking about others' ideas and perspectives.

One commented at length on the ways in which participation in the gatherings had created a basis for stronger relationships beyond the program:

It was great to share the program with a couple of people that i collaborate with in community settings -- gave us an experience of shared fun that can help us weather any interpersonal difficulties that arise. also found my 'outside' singing with one friend expanded and enhanced as we both bring more improvising to our band.

One participant commented that the workshops would influence their teaching practice, saying, "[One facilitator's] conducting system will be particularly useful while working with students."

Participants' Motivations and Interests

Participants' responses demonstrated that they had entered into the programming for a range of reasons. For some, it was for the kind of broad artistic development discussed above; for others, it was to improve very specific skills related to vocal improvisation; and some were motivated by a desire for a new experiences or to meet people. As mentioned above, one person valued learning specific hand gestures used in conduction.

One participant commented that the group seemed to want to question and understand the process, rather than simply giving into it, as others might. This person felt that participants "had more questions they needed answered as we went, wanted to understand it intellectually more than was necessary to focus on." The participant sees this as a response based in discomfort with the materials or processes, saying that people "usually do this out of fear - make it cerebral." These perceived differences in groups' responses could indicate a level of anxiety or unfamiliarity in some participants, or could simply also reveal different motivations and priorities on the part of participants.

SAFETY AND CONFIDENCE
When asked whether their participation in the program had impacted their confidence around musical improvisation, respondents articulated a number of ways in which their confidence had increased. These benefits included increased confidence in their own vocal abilities, both in terms of their performance and their teaching practices, confidence in their ability to collaborate with others, and confidence in the group itself. "The huge surge in confidence arose not out "wow I'm good at this," but out of learning to deeply trust and value the importance of everything everyone had to offer in any given moment," commented one respondent. Another said that taking part in the workshops had "helped me realize not only new frontiers that I'm capable of, but that I'm especially capable of with others."

One respondent commented that, "the open, accepting climate [facilitated by a workshop leader] made for great ease and safety that helped me try things and thus build confidence" and another eloquently describes the sense of freedom and openness that came from the workshop experiences:

What stands out for me is the shock, awe, and sheer delight in discovering together sounds I never knew were possible, and sounds I'd never given myself permission or space to make. As a singer, it has busted down whatever walls of acceptable norms that I didn't even know I was being held in by...

The respondents' frequent use of words like safety, freedom, and permission, and the image of destroying walls of inhibition, indicate that participants experienced a sense of comfort and openness to new practices. A central theme in their discussions was that of safety, as illustrated by the following quotations:

> *What helped me push through was the trust that as soon as we started singing, everything would fall into place, and whatever anxiety they were feeling would dissipate...*

> *I don't know what I was afraid, but I've been holding on to it for a long time. Too long!*

This sense of safety generated a willingness to explore and to push boundaries in vocalization. Many participants commented that the musical forms they were practicing together, with their lack of conventional structures and evaluation, gave them a sense of freedom. Often, this freedom had meaning beyond musical expression and seems to have affected people's sense of self.

> *Completely different than anything I've ever experienced before! No sense of measuring up, getting it right, doing it well, needing to impress.*

> *The practise of feeling safe to be myself and allow others to do the same without feeling imposed upon or threatened was inherently educational. The challenges were welcomed.*

> *As an artist and human being, it was the most fun, freeing and beneficial experience I've had in recent memory.*

> *We felt it when it was happening, no need for external validation or standards.*

FACILITATION

The lack of external evaluation described in the final comment leads nicely into a discussion of respondents' broader commentary about program facilitation. Because the gatherings/workshops were facilitated by a number of people, respondents' comments on this topic were often very specific, detailing particular events or moments and commenting upon the facilitator's actions at those times. For the purposes of this evaluation, particularly its role in shaping future programming, it seems most useful to offer generalized reporting on the traits and approaches that participants found helpful or unhelpful.

Respondents overwhelmingly commented favorably on the rotating facilitation, and appreciated having the opportunity to work and learn with several practitioners. As one person commented, "Each workshop leader had unique approaches to vocalization that was very helpful to experience."

Participants also commented that the facilitators had created a welcoming, comfortable environment: "I very much appreciated the generosity and openness of the artists, encouraging everyone to trust. experiment and expand." They also commented that it was helpful to have clarity and guidance from facilitators. "I felt instructions and intentions were clearly stated and there were plenty of reflective moments in which to process the improvisations. This is in accordance with trainings I have previously participated in."

Some respondents mentioned that there had been some challenging moments, with the group pausing the vocalization and discussing the implications and meaning of certain signals and practices. In fact, several respondents mentioned the same incident – a session where tension around the name used for a certain hand gesture had led to what many described as a prolonged discussion about the significance, implications, and appropriateness of the name. Some felt this conversation had been necessary and helpful, while others found it distracting. Responses indicated that strong facilitation is key to resolving or managing these kinds of unanticipated challenges. While respondents had differing interpretations of the incident, traits of openness and good mediation skills were identified as being necessary in this kind of context.

Other characteristics that participants identified as contributing to effective facilitation include confidence, familiarity with the material, inclusivity and openness. One commented quite revealingly that, "we were encouraged to be %100 authentic in our self-expression, while listen and staying mindful of where others and the group were going" and another noted that "Everyone was supportive and helpful." This suggests that facilitation style enabled the creation of a warm, supportive group culture.

Finally, one participant described the process whereby anxiety and tension would dissipate, as the trust and safety established in the group enabled participants to let them go and participate. They comment that this happened because "we were always given complete permission to not follow instructions (whether not following happened intentionally or not."

RELATIONSHIPS AND COMMUNITY BUILDING

Respondents clearly identified the ways in which participation in the workshops and other parts of the programming had affected their relationships with and sense of a broader community. One participant reflected on the broader significance of the workshops, identifying them as having provided,

> *The kind of advanced learning that is VERY good in any community for people to have a possibility of doing, there are next to no workshops that are held at this level of this kind of truly consciously creative calibre, where you create in the moment within a rich experiential environment, and they are so badly needed as learning experiences AND creative/performance outlet experiences.*

Others spoke of the impact of participation on specific interpersonal relationships; this participant spoke of a deep sense of connection with group members:

> *If I were to meet any of them on the street now, I would definitely feel connected, happy to see them, and would love to invite them for a coffee etc. This kind of experience, sharing of ourselves at this level brings you closer than you feel to regular acquaintances or even some friends. It's like we've met the true essence of each other, beyond all social facades.*

It seems clear that both the subject matter and the facilitation of the workshops created a sense of community and connection that participants noted are quite unlike their normal experiences:

> *Completely different than anything I've ever experienced before! No sense of measuring up, getting it right, doing it well, needing to impress; we were encouraged to be %100 authentic in our self-expression, while listen and staying mindful of where others and the group were going. We felt it when it was happening, no need for external validation or standards... it would emerge as a collective "wow" moment where I bet each of us felt integral to the whole.*

Another speaks in more grounded terms about the function of the workshops in creating new social contacts, saying "I'm new to Guelph and this was a great way to meet like-minded people."

A final note on the theme of community building comes from a participant who emphasizes the need for and value of "more learning experiences […] where you realize you can give yourself permission to just be in the moment and allow whatever is happening to happen as you are consciously aware of where you're at in the moment and what's being created around you". The respondent states that "to create space for this is enormously vitally important in any community."

PROGRAM FEATURES

As the last comment demonstrates, facilitation is closely related to the broader characteristics of programming, which we have identified as our fourth of the five themes drawn from the qualitative responses. Several sub-themes are illustrated in participants' commentary regarding the structure and features of the programming.

First, many respondents felt that there was a great value and impact in the programming's extended and repeated occurrence, as opposed to a one-off, stand-alone session. One found "that continuing over time helped me integrate the freedom and new (to me) sound-making into my musical practice outside the series." Another urges the continuation of programming: "I very highly recommend that you continue running these, people only grow in confidence and skills and they are never the same twice."

The decision to have the workshops facilitated by a series of different people was also praised by many. One participant states, "It was great to work with several different artists. They were all liberating in different ways."

The programming's lack of registration fee or cost of any kind was identified as a key factor in participants' access and enjoyment. "The free-of-cost programming is so important and appreciated -- accessible and inviting," says one respondent. Another urges IICSI to "continue to fund and host great community-building work of this type."

Implicit in many responses, and touched upon above in discussions of safety, confidence, and freedom, was an appreciation of the sessions' balance between structure and guidance on the one hand, and freedom and openness on the other. This structured fluidity in the programming – which is reminiscent of improvised performance broadly speaking - apparently guided the gatherings and the final performance, and seems to have created asense of security from which participants felt empowered to experiment and to push their boundaries, in various ways.

The Instruction was clear, the structure to the final performance was in a beautiful facility & the structure was well established yet fluid enough to accommodate several last minute changes. The entire thing - Workshops & Final Performance - Had a very well thought out aspect that combined with room for spontaneity.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE PROGRAMMING

Respondents offered many thoughtful responses to the question about suggestions for future programming. These are captured below for future reference – and are also quite instructive as a way of reflecting on the programming being evaluated.

Publicity/Outreach

Many respondents commented that the vocal improvisation programming could have been publicized more effectively, suggesting that broader publicity – for example, with posters in surrounding cities, or with more of them distributed locally – could have drawn more participants to the events. One noted, "Working in the performing arts I was surprised that I found out about this through a poster on a telephone pole, especially given the calibre of this free-of-charge event." Others explicitly suggested a concerted effort to draw participants from "marginalized communities, people who might not feel that they "belong" in such a group." One suggested that this could be achieved by reaching out to community leaders from a broad range of communities in order to make sure the opportunity was known and open to "seniors, youth, people with socio-economic and mobility challenges, perhaps newcomers."

Venue

Some respondents commented that the shifting venue for the gatherings (caused by construction and other logistical factors at the main site) was a challenge, and suggested it would work better to have a consistent location. Another commented that the 'backup' space used when the main one was unavailable was too small, saying "A larger space is necessary with freedom to sit in a decent chair when needed or stand up and move when needed, but where it feels like a creative space in which to explore."

Facilitation

As noted in other sections, apart from in relation to a few challenging moments, respondents largely reported positive feedback on the session facilitators and their approaches to the subject matter. One respondent advised that future iterations focus on securing "the best teachers possible, at the highest level. But also those who "get" doing this the best. So it does not mean the biggest NAMES necessary, but the best TEACHERS." This suggests that skill and ability are more important to participants than 'star power' – though others noted that it had been significant to work with prominent artists in the field.

Programming/subject matter

Respondents offered suggestions for future improvising workshops/programs. These suggestions included: incorporating more physical movement into voice programming; adding workshops differentiated by level of interest and experience (introductory, deeper immersion for those familiar with basics, etc); adding programming that is explicitly aimed at untrained or amateur improvisers; and one commented specifically that s/he would be "very interested in programming that explicitly

explores connections of improvising practice with social change theory -- e.g. the work of Ben Grossman and Lynette Segal."

Continuity

Finally, participants emphasized their interest in having further programming, offered consistently on an ongoing basis. These comments seemed to be based in both a sense of group cohesion and community, on one hand, and a keen interest in continuing to explore and learn about vocal improvisation. One noted that "It seemed like a tantalizing appetizer, so I encourage you to continue this project !"

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Participant feedback provided much insight into the impact of various components of the vocal improvisation programming. These findings can be interpreted in the larger context of this program, IICSI's community programming in general, and in the context of this evaluation project and future evaluations.

First, to pick up on respondents' comments about publicity for the vocal programming, we suggest it would be advisable for IICSI to consider the extent to which the community vocal improvisation programming was made visible to a range of community members. Given IICSI's interest in engaging a broad range of communities, we echo respondents' suggestion that IICSI seek out publicity strategies that may encourage wider participation, particularly among vulnerable or marginalized populations who may not access programming at the same rates as other groups. It is unclear how effectively the publicity reached people in these groups, as we have no data on the demographics of the mailing lists used to publicize. Thus, it is difficult to assess whether the composition of the group reflects interest levels, awareness of the programming, logistical challenges such as transportation and work hours, or any number of other factors.

It is worth noting that none of the responding participants learned of the community vocal improvisation programming through the ICASP/IICSI website. It could be helpful to evaluate the use and effectiveness of website publicity and to either make changes to the website or employ other means of publicizing future events.

Though we cannot tell for certain, the qualitative responses suggest that the gatherings drew people who largely already identified as musicians or music instructors. Depending on IICSI's goals with regards to extending programming to amateurs and non-musicians, it is worth considering ways to draw in non-artists – and to continue to seek their feedback on how/whether participation affects their personal feelings, group dynamics, and broader communities. Further, given IICSI's research interests in the individual, group, and community impacts of improvised artistic practices, it seems advisable to consider attaching a research component to this kind of programming in future, so that responses / interviews / other data can contribute to analysis, research development, and scholarly publications on the topic.

Relatedly, given the survey's low response rate, it may be worthwhile to explore alternative or additional evaluation methodologies to capture a wider range of participants' experiences and feedback. Given the longer term nature of programming, methods that collect feedback from

participants and program facilitators at multiple points in time may be useful to capture key moments and changes along the way. This could inform future programming decisions in ways that support IICSI's broader research, outreach, and other goals.

Many respondents expressed interest in further and ongoing community programming, describing this as a means to continue developing as a vocal improvisation artist and to maintain connections with other participants. Given this strong interest, it may be of great benefit to IICSI and to program participants and their communities to explore ways to support long-term, ongoing public programming. It is clear that the majority of participants felt their confidence and connectedness were positively impacted by their participation in the vocal programming; while we cannot make conclusions from the current data set, it is possible that longer-term programming could have even greater impact in these areas.

Finally, while this program evaluation was not designed nor intended to test the tenets of improvisation theory, it is worth noting the ways in which participants' responses seem to affirm some of the central emphases of work in this field. Respondents repeatedly commented that the attentive listening, leveling of power dynamics, responsivity, and openness of the workshops – both in terms of their process and their subject matter – had created a sense of community, safety, confidence, and freedom. The discussions of facilitation and of group dynamic seemed to indicate that the improvising group had created, even if for a short time, an alternate model of community and artistic practice, a group and a place that seemed to have affected participants' senses of themselves and their relationships even in the world beyond the workshops. Surely these findings, if developed and pursued further as a research process, could contribute very meaningfully to the developing field of Critical Improvisation Studies, particularly to the investigation of the ways in which artistic practices might contribute to broader community impacts.

CONCLUSION

The current evaluation provides much insight into the impacts of IICSI's community vocal improvisation programming through the thoughtful reflections of program participants. This valuable information will be used to inform decision-making around future offerings of IICSI's community vocal improvisation programming. Additionally, the benefits and challenges of the approaches used will inform future evaluations, particularly for IICSI's community programming but also in terms of evaluation in the larger context of the institution's core research and engagement activities.

APPENDIX A

EMAIL RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

Thank you for your participation in Improvisation, Community, and Social Practice (ICASP)/International Institute for Critical Studies in Improvisation (IICSI) musical improvisation programming!

ICASP/IICSI is partnering with the Institute for Community Engaged Scholarship (ICES) at the University of Guelph to carry out an evaluation of its improvisation programming. This is not a formal research study meant to inform a wide audience, but instead is a short survey intended to collect information that willhelp inform and improve our community improvisation programming. A formal university ethics review process was not necessary for this evaluation. Nevertheless, important ethical considerations were taken into account in the design and distribution of this survey, with the interests and well being of participants being held in the highest regard.

It is estimated that completion of this survey will take about **10 minutes**. Your completion of this survey is completely voluntary and will not affect your participation in this program or participation in future ICASP/IICSI programming in any way. Please feel free to leave blank any questions you would prefer to not answer.**We ask that only those who are 16 or older fill out this survey.**

Information gathered from this survey will be written into a report format to be used internally by ICASP/IICSI staff and students and a copy of the report will be posted in the ICASP/IICSI and ICES websites. Survey responses will be analyzed and organized into broad themes and no findings will be attributed to any specific program participant. Any directly identifying information will be removed and not included in the final report. At the end of this survey you may also opt to not have direct quotations from your survey included in the final report. You will also have the option to request an electronic copy of the final report and a summary once it is written.

If you have any questions regarding this survey or the information collected, please contact **Lindsey Thomson**, staff lead for this evaluation.

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APPENDIX B

ONLINE SURVEY

1. How did you first learn of the vocal gatherings and/or workshops? (check all that apply):
   a. Through the ICASP website
   b. Newspaper
   c. Poster
   d. Mailing list (email)
   e. Word of mouth
   f. Other: **[Open text box]**

2. How many vocal gatherings with Christopher Tonelli did you attend, if any?
   a. 1-2
   b. 3-4
   c. 5-7
   d. 8-10
   e. None

3. Which of the following workshops did you attend, if any?
   a. Sessions with Chris Tonelli (March 30th-May 4th)
   b. Christine Duncan (May 18th)
   c. Susanna Hood & ChristopherTonelli (June 1st)
   d. Paul Dutton (June 15th)
   e. W. Mark Sutherland (June 22nd)
   f. Phil Minton & Maggie Nicols (June 24th)
   g. None

4. Which of the following sessions did you attend at the Symposium on Voice, Agency, and Improvisation at the MacDonald Stewart Art Gallery, if any?
   a. Morning paper panel
   b. Public interview with Phil Minton and Maggie Nicols
   c. Afternoon artists' panel
   d. Open vocal workshop
   e. None

5. If you attended the Symposium, were there portions that you found most valuable? Why?
[Open text box]

6. Did you take part in the final performance?
   a. Yes
   b. No

7. Please describe any particular parts of the gatherings, workshops, and/or final performance that stood out for you as being the most fun, freeing, or beneficial.

8. Please describeany particular parts of the gatherings, workshops, and/or final performance that stood out for you as being the most challenging or frustrating. Was there anything in particular that helped you push through these challenging times?

9. In what ways, if any, were your experiences in the vocal gatherings/workshops similar to and/or different from any previous musical instruction you have participated in?

10. To what extent did your participation in the program <u>positively</u> impact your feelings of confidence around musical improvisation?
    a. Not at all
    b. A little
    c. Somewhat
    d. A great deal
    Is there anything more you would like to say about this?

    [Open text box]

11. To what extent did your participation in the program <u>positively</u> impact your connection/relationship(s) to other program participant(s)?
    a. Not at all
    b. A little
    c. Somewhat
    d. A great deal
    Is there anything more you would like to say about this?

    [Open text box]

12. Would you be interested in participating in further improvisation programming connected with ICASP/IICSI in the future?
    a. Not at all
    b. A little
    c. Somewhat
    d. A great deal
    Is there anything more you would like to say about this?

    [Open text box]

13. To what extent would you recommend to <u>others</u> that they participate in improvisation programming connected with ICASP/IICSIin the future?
    a. Not at all
    b. A little
    c. Somewhat
    d. A great deal
Is there anything more you would like to say about this?

[Open text box]

14. Based on your experiences, do you have any suggestions as to how we may improve our improvisation programming?

15. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your experiences in the vocal improvisation gatherings and/or workshops?

16. Are you comfortable with us using direct quotes from the information you have provided in this survey for the final report (with any directly identifying information <u>removed</u>)?
    a. Yes
    b. No

17. Would you like a copy of the final report/summary to be sent to you via email?
    a. Yes
        i. If yes, please provide an email address where we can send the report: **[Open text box]**
    b. No

Thank you for your participation in our improvisation programming and for sharing your experiences and suggestions through this survey!

REFERENCES

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